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## “CONFESSION” POEM

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Now that you’ve finished WARM-UPS A-F, let’s make this a poem!

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Step One: Read these excerpts from Lowell Jaeger’s poem, “Confessions”.  
Mark everything about the poem which makes it *poetry*.

I’ve thrown sticks at stray dogs.  
I’ve ignored the cat  
scratching to get in.  
Even in rain I’ve spent  
idle hours watching tv, while  
not two feet away  
philodendrons for lack of  
water, gasp and expire.

Once my tiniest daughter banged  
in the backdoor, beaming, her fist  
full of wadded five-dollar bill she’d  
unearthed on the playground. For it  
I swapped the shiny fifty-cent piece  
she mingled among her pennies, her  
plastic purse jingling with joy.

I’ve neglected birthdays  
of people who remember mine  
First week of December last year  
an old friend mailed me a shirt.  
I wore it twice, decided it wasn’t  
for me, folded it, wrapped it , put  
it under the tree. “Merry Xmas Brother.”

I once hung that little brother  
by the straps of his overalls  
on a utility hook nailed into  
the garage wall, five feet high.  
He giggled helplessly at his  
big brother’s mischief. I dashed inside  
to fetch the Instamatic I’d got  
for being nine, wanting to snap  
his scrapbook smile . . .

I once swiped a tin of Vienna  
sausages. I crouched low in the aisle  
as if studying percents  
of daily requirements, tore off the lid.  
I cruised the produce, pocketed  
a nectarine, popped seedless grapes  
into the hopper, fast as my choppers  
could chew. A man in a white, bloody  
apron intercepted me at checkout.

**“Poetry is language that requires us to pay close attention  
in order that we read it well.”  
– William Stafford**

Step Two: It’s time to force yourself down to the essence of language, to cut nonessentials!

WHAT? Cut your poem to the “bones.” Only what’s golden—what’s *poetic* should remain!

- Each **STANZA** must be **5-9 LINES** long.
- Each **LINE** must be **5-9 WORDS** long.

HOW?

(From *Getting the Knack* by William Stafford and Stephen Dunning)

- (1) The easiest way is to eliminate not single words or phrases but sentences or parts of sentences. Save the best and “reconnect” it.
- (2) After you’ve cut parts, find different words/images to substitute for the ordinary place in your “Warm-Up” version.
- (3) Also look for duplications of words or feelings. Cut or combine.
- (3) Look at all adjectives and adverbs: cut unless they’re pure gold. Consider the accuracy of the nouns and verbs they modify. Could you be more specific with them?
- (5) Cut the starters we provided earlier. (*Once I . . . , Another time . . .*)
- (6) Cut all connectors that aren’t absolutely necessary. Little, grammatical words especially: *the, an, but, for, when, since, after, into . . .*
- (7) Readers of poems know how to “leap” from one image to the next, so look for places where an image can substitute for a description.
- (8) Look for phrases where a single word or shorter version of a phrase can take the place of something longer.